

The American



Jewish Committee

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PERSONAL & CONFIDENTIAL

December 30, 1980

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Office of the President
The Rockefeller University
1230 York Avenue
New York, NY 10021

Dear Dr. Lederberg:

Please excuse my delay in responding to your personal memo of December 1. It arrived the day I was leaving for Morocco on a two week familiarization trip and today is my first full day back at the office.

As to your question whether any Israeli government has indicated its amenability to providing bases to the U. S. on Israeli territory, the first government officially to do so was that of David Ben Gurion. He favored a formal U. S.-Israeli mutual security pact. The U. S. government, which at that time was courting the Arab states, was unwilling to do so. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles indicated that the U. S. might consider such a treaty only after the Arab states and Israel had definitively concluded peace and agreed upon what the borders of Israel were to be. No Arab state at that time was willing to conclude peace with Israel.

The provision by Israel of bases to the U. S. would have been a natural feature of such a mutual security treaty, but since the U. S. was not prepared for a treaty at that time, the question of bases remained moot.

In subsequent years, the idea of a treaty under which the U. S. would "guarantee" Israel was occasionally raised. The Israelis were naturally skeptical about the value of such guarantees at a time of crisis, especially after the experience of May 1967 showed that the promises made a decade earlier by the U. S. and the European powers to support Israel's exercise of its maritime rights evaporated in the face of Abdel Nasser's pressures. Moreover, most of the proposals for American guarantees came from such persons as Sen. William Fulbright and George Ball, raising Israeli suspicions that the guarantees were intended as a sub-

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stitute for defensible borders rather than as a supplement to them. The other objections that we have heard from Israeli sources to American bases have been that they would restrict Israel's freedom of action in dealing with threats from neighboring Arab states, would restrict Israel's hard-won independence, and would give the impression that Israel depended on American manpower to defend itself. Both as a matter of pride and of good public relations in the U. S., Israel officials have repeatedly emphasized that they do not want a single American soldier to fight for them. All they want is the hardware to defend themselves. All this, of course, is in the context of an Arab-Israeli conflict. Should there be the danger of direct Soviet intervention, the Israelis would want the U. S. to interdict any Soviet intervention. In the past, there has been an implicit American-Israeli understanding that such intervention constitutes a threat not only to Israel but to the global balance of power.

Whether the Reagan, Begin and Sadat administrations would now agree to a formalization of a coalition against Soviet intervention remains to be seen. As for the Saudis, I believe they would like the U. S. to come to their defense in extremis, and they would like the Russians to be absolutely certain that the U. S. would indeed defend Saudi Arabia, but I do not believe that they would agree to the formal stationing of American troops in Saudi Arabia itself. The question is whether they would tacitly agree to American bases in the Sinai, which from a Saudi point of view is certainly Arab and not Israeli territory.

Finally, the Begin government has indicated to the U. S. that it would be prepared to make Israeli facilities available to the U. S. whenever the U. S. needed them. This is less than a formal base, but it could serve much the same purpose in a crisis. The official U. S. government response has been to note the Israeli offer, but the current administration has been reluctant to formalize any such arrangement. As I indicated in the attached memo which was sent to our field staff, agreement to make the Sinai bases available to the U. S. might also help ease the simmering controversy between the U. S. and Israel as to how to create a credible peacekeeping force between Egypt and Israel in view of the Russian objections to the stationing of UNEF along the border. But as Professor Tucker and others have pointed out, a strategic base to project American power into the Persian Gulf area is not the same as a peacekeeping force and it will require some imaginative juggling to have the bases serve both purposes.

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Dr. Joshua Lederberg

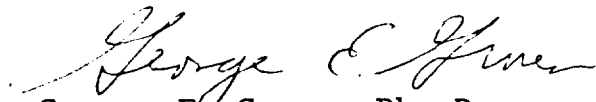
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I hope this information helps clarify the situation, which, as you must so well realize, is quite complex.

Kind regards and best wishes for the new year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "George E. Gruen".

George E. Gruen, Ph. D.
Director, Middle East Affairs

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